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ABSTRACT

Stereotypically, anger is associated more with males than females, yet self-report and observational measures have not unequivocally revealed gender-related differences in anger expression. To explore this contradiction, male (n=21)and female (n=23) college students were asked to describe anger incidents they had witnessed that involved either a known person or a stranger. Students recalled situations in which someone became angry and were then asked a series of questions regarding the incident. The gender of the person described was noted and participants were then asked to describe anger incidents involving someone of the other gender. Findings with respect to gender were mixed. When describing an incident involving a stranger, participants were more likely to recall a male than a female expressing anger. When participants described an episode involving a person known to them, a pattern more consistent with findings based on self-report and observational measures, which usually yield no gender-related differences in anger expression, was apparent. Participants were as likely to describe a male as they were to describe a female expressing anger when recalling an incident involving a known person. Findings indicate that anger may be gender-typed as masculine because men are more likely than women to express anger in public settings. Contains 13 references. (RJM)

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Exploring the Gender-Anger Link: The Role of Setting

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ABSTRACT

Stereotypically, anger is associated more with males than females, yet self-report and observational measures have not unequivocally revealed gender-related differences in anger expression. To explore this contradiction, males and females described anger incidents they had witnessed, which involved either a known person or a stranger. Gender of the person described first in both known person and stranger incidents was noted, and participants were then asked to describe anger incidents involving someone of the other gender. Findings indicate that anger may be gender-typed as male because men are more likely than women to express anger in public settings. Self-report and direct observation measures may not show gender-related differences because such measures assess anger expression in predominantly private settings.

Anger is unique among the emotions in being associated stereotypically with males rather than females (Fabes & Martin, 1991; Shields, 1991). This symbolic connection of anger with masculinity is also represented in conceptions of femininity as requiring avoidance of expression of angry feelings (Miller, 1986). Despite widely held beliefs that link anger with males and masculinity, attempts to assess empirically the experience and expression of anger by individual males and females have failed to yield evidence that anger is an emotion particularly characteristic of males. For instance, findings of studies employing self-report measures have not consistently revealed that males are more likely than females to experience or express anger in their everyday lives (Brody & Hall, 1993; Kopper & Epperson, 1996; Sharkin, 1993). Similarly, data derived from direct observational methods have not provided unequivocal support for a presumed greater male than female propensity to express anger (Brody & Hall, 1993; White & Kowalski, 1994). This apparent contradiction between gender-anger stereotypes and the lack of gender-related differences when individuals' experience and expression of anger have been investigated empirically is the focus of the present study.

In theoretical models formulated to account for gender-related differences in social behavior, aspects of the situational context or setting have been implicated in the emergence of gender-based behavioral patterns (cf. Deaux & Major, 1987). With regard to emotional expression, LaFrance and Banaji (1992) have proposed that differences related to gender are most likely to be present when emotional behavior is assessed in social contexts involving the presence of others, i.e., publicly. Thus, one source of the relative lack of gender-related differences observed in anger expression may lie in use of research methods which focus on

emotional behavior that takes place primarily in the absence of other people. Another meaning of "public" resides in the distinction drawn between the public and private domains of people's everyday lives. In this usage, behavior may take place in the presence of others, but in a "private" setting, such as the home. Public settings comprise those outside the home, characterized by "others" who are mostly strangers, such as shopping malls, streets, bars and other settings open to the "general public." Perhaps indices of anger expression derived from behavior in such public settings would reveal evidence that males are more likely than females to express anger. Consistent with this possibility, broader societal indices, such as crime statistics, indicate a preponderance of males among those who engage in aggressive, violent behavior in the public (non-domestic) domain, but not in the domestic (private) domain (Ben-David, 1993).

Another source of the contradiction between stereotyped beliefs regarding the gender-anger link and lack of consistent gender-related differences on self-report and observational measures of anger expression may be one inherent in the methodologies employed in each area. Stereotype measures typically assess beliefs about emotionality in respect to broad social categories, such as "women (or men) in general." Self-report and direct observation measures, on the other hand, are designed to yield information about the emotional behavior of specific individuals. These contrasting methodological approaches also imply somewhat different situational contexts for the behavior under consideration. Stereotype measures generally are nonspecific with respect to the settings of behavioral attributes and characteristics upon which judgments are made. Nevertheless, the wording of instructions may imply a more public setting involving individuals who are strangers to the person completing the measure. Thus, findings

with stereotype measures may partly tap people's beliefs about the behavior of strangers in relatively impersonal, public situations. In contrast, findings derived from self-report and direct observational procedures with specific individuals may provide information which focuses on emotional expression in private or domestic settings with familiar or known others.

This analysis suggests that one way of interpreting findings to date on the gender-anger link is that anger expression is constrained by, or actively managed (induced or suppressed) (LaFrance & Banaji, 1992) depending on, the type of situational context in which people's everyday activities take place. Thus, men may be more likely than women to express anger in impersonal, public settings. In private settings with familiar others, while males and females may express anger behaviorally in somewhat different ways (Campbell, 1993), anger expression itself is not a gender-related phenomenon.

Given the limitations inherent in choosing any particular method for assessing emotional expression in relation to gender, how might the proposed link between setting and anger expression be explored? Several methodological considerations have been identified in discussions of research on gender and emotional expression. An important research requirement is that the influence of gender stereotype beliefs be diminished by reducing cues that could make gender salient to study participants (Brody & Hall, 1993). Another methodological proposal is that actual rather than hypothetical incidents involving emotional expression be the focus of study (Sharkin, 1993), in order to reduce the potential impact of beliefs about the gender appropriateness of specific forms of emotional expression. The design of a study with respect to treatment of gender as a "subject" or a "stimulus" variable has also been identified as critical to

whether results yield evidence of gender-related differences in emotional expression (Shields, 1991).

A suitable method for exploring the role of setting in the link between gender and anger, therefore, would be one that can incorporate the specificity of approaches focused on individual responses in actual situations, while avoiding the influence of gender stereotype beliefs as a potential source of bias. At the same time, the method selected would need to be sufficiently flexible to allow emotional behavior in varied settings to be explored. One direction for developing a methodology having the features identified is suggested by the procedure employed by Shields (1987) to explore people's descriptions of the most emotional person they knew. Using this procedure, Shields found that people (college students) typically identified a woman as being the most "emotional" person known to them. An advantage of this procedure is its focus on actual (not hypothetical) individuals, while removing (or at least reducing) the salience of gender to participants.

In the present study, Shields' procedure was modified by asking participants to describe incidents in which they had witnessed (but were not the target of) anger expression by someone. By using a procedure in which participants described incidents in which another person expressed anger it was hoped to minimize the influence of gender-based self-presentational concerns (LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). As well, instructions to participants made no reference to gender and the nature of the setting in which an incident took place was unspecified. When this procedural approach was used by Shields, the wording of instructions directed the attention of participants to persons known to them. In the current modification, while it was anticipated that

participants would initially describe an incident involving someone known to them, they were also asked to provide an account of an anger incident in which the person expressing anger was not known to them, i.e., a stranger. By this means, it was hoped to elicit accounts from participants depicting anger incidents in various settings, both "public" and "private".

Based on existing findings regarding the conditions under which gender-related differences in anger expression may be more or less pronounced, it was expected that accounts of anger incidents would reveal few differences related to gender when the protagonist was someone known to a participant. When the "angry" person was a stranger, however, incidents involving males were expected to be recounted more readily. The setting of anger incidents was also expected to differ, depending on whether the person described was someone known or a stranger. When a known person expressed anger, incidents in private settings were expected to be described more frequently than those in public settings. For anger incidents involving strangers, public settings were expected to predominate. Other features of anger incidents described by participants, in particular the gender of the target of anger expression, were also explored with respect to whether the main protagonist in an incident was a known person or a stranger.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were male (N=21) and female (N=23) students (age M=21.4 years, SD= 5.4 years) enroled in an introductory undergraduate course in psychology. Participants were

Caucasian and in this respect representative of the student population from which they were drawn. Students volunteered to participate in the study in return for course credit.

Procedure

Sessions were conducted individually by a female research assistant and followed a standard interview format. Participants' responses were audiotaped for later transcription. The time to complete an interview session ranged from 15 to 20 minutes. At the end of each session, participants were fully debriefed concerning the purpose of the study.

Each interview session was conducted according to the following format. First, the research assistant asked the participant "...to think about a situation in which someone got angry recently. When you've thought of someone, let me know, then I'll ask several questions about the situation and the person." The participant was then invited to provide information about the anger incident in the sequence indicated by the following questions:

1) Describe the situation in which the person got angry.

2) What did the person do or say that indicated to you that he/she was angry?

3) What happened after the person got angry?

4) How well do you know the person who got angry?

These questions were modeled on those used by Shields (1987).

In the next part of the session, if the participant had first described someone known to them, he/she was asked to think of a situation in which someone not known to them (a stranger) got angry. Similarly, if the person described first was a stranger, the participant was next asked to think of an incident involving someone known to them. The series of interview questions was

repeated for the second incident. The participant was next asked to think of a person of the other gender from the one first described for the known person and stranger categories, respectively, and for each the same series of questions was repeated. In summary, each participant was asked to describe four anger incidents altogether - two involving a known person (a male and a female) and two involving a stranger (a male and a female).

If a participant could not immediately recall an incident fitting a particular category, she/he was given a few moments to see if one came to mind. If the participant still could not recall such an incident after some thought, the research assistant proceeded to the next category. At the end of the session, the participant was given a second opportunity to recall an incident in a previously "missed" category. In the few instances in which a participant was unable to recall an incident fitting a particular category, he/she was assured by the research assistant that this omission was entirely acceptable. All participants were able to describe an incident involving a male known to them and all but one recalled an incident involving a female known to them. One participant could not recall an incident involving a male stranger, while five participants were unable to describe an incident involving a female stranger.

Dependent Measures

The audiotaped sessions were transcribed verbatim. For each participant, the following information was coded from the transcripts:

a) the gender of the angry person in the first incident described that involved a known person;

b) the gender of the angry person in the first incident described that involved a stranger;

c) the setting of each incident. Setting was defined as private (i.e., home, apartment, student

residence room) or public (i.e., street, parking lot, shopping mall, bar or restaurant, public areas of a student residence building). In addition, a third setting category of "workplace" was included in order to encompass all incidents described by participants. The setting of an anger incident was coded as "workplace" if it took place in an office or in a classroom. Setting was coded by two independent raters, yielding an inter-rater agreement of .82 (kappa).

d) the gender of the person who was the target of anger expression in each incident.

Some additional aspects of each incident were coded as required in order to further interpret findings with respect to the key variables listed (see Results).

RESULTS

There were no effects of participant gender, so results are reported for the combined sample.

Gender of Person Expressing Anger: First Known Person and Stranger Incidents

For almost all participants (91%), the first anger incident described involved a person who was known to them (a friend, spouse/partner, or close relative). When first recounting an anger incident involving a known person, 26 participants described a male protagonist and 18 described a female. Although incidents involving males were numerically more frequent, a chi-square test yielded a non-significant value (1.45).

When first describing an incident involving a stranger, more participants described a male (29 participants) than a female (15 participants). In this case, the difference in frequency was

significant (chi-square = 3.93, $p<.05$).

Setting of Anger Incident

When incidents described by participants involved known persons, the majority (57%) took place in a private setting (e.g., person's home) rather than a public or workplace setting (chi-square = 37, $p<.001$) (see Table I). The interaction between setting of incidents and gender of angry person also was significant (chi-square = 8.92, $p<.02$). Further analysis, using z-tests for correlated proportions (Ferguson, 1966, p. 178) indicated that when an anger incident involving a known person took place in a public setting, the known person was significantly more likely to be a male than a female ($z = 3.09$, $p<.01$). Although the number of anger incidents involving known persons that occurred in a workplace setting was small (n = 7), such incidents were more likely to have a female than a male protagonist ($z = 2.00$, $p<.05$).

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insert Table I about here

The majority (80%) of incidents involving strangers took place in a public rather than a private or workplace setting (chi-square = 84, $p<.001$) (see Table I). The interaction between setting and gender of the angry person was not significant.

Gender of Target of Anger Expression

In incidents in which a person known to the participant expressed anger toward another person, the target of anger was most likely to be an individual of the other gender (see Table II). In incidents with male protagonists, the target of anger was significantly more likely to be a

female than a male ($z = 2.27$, $p=.03$) and when the angry person was a female, the target of anger was significantly more likely to be a male than a female ($z = 2.12$, $p=.04$). Examination of information provided in participants' accounts with respect to the nature of the relationship between the angry person and the target of anger offers one plausible interpretation of these findings. The most common type of relationship between the angry person and the target of anger was that of spouse or romantic partner (boy- or girl-friend).

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insert Table II about here

For incidents involving strangers, where anger was expressed toward another person present in the situation, the target of anger was significantly more likely to be a male than a female (chi-square = 49.73, $p<.001$) and this was the case whether the person expressing anger was male or female (see Table II). If the target of anger expression comprised more than one person, the angry person was more likely to be a male than a female ($z = 2.65$, $p=.01$). In addition, when the target of anger was a child, the angry person was more likely to be a female than a male ($z = 2.13$, $p=.04$). (Stranger incidents in which a female expressed anger toward a child typically were ones involving a mother attempting to deal with the unruly behavior of a child in a shopping mall.)

DISCUSSION

When participants recounted incidents in which a known person or a stranger expressed

anger, findings with respect to the gender of the person initially described for each type of incident reflected a mixed pattern. When first describing an incident involving a stranger, participants were more likely to recall a male than a female expressing anger. This pattern is similar to findings in studies of gender-emotion stereotypes that anger expression is associated with males (Fabes & Martin, 1991). A pattern more consistent with findings based on self-report and observational measures, which generally have not yielded evidence of gender-related differences in anger expression (Sharkin, 1993), was apparent in participants' descriptions of incidents involving persons known to them. Thus, when describing an incident involving a known person, participants were as likely to describe a male as they were to describe a female expressing anger.

Other differences emerged between known person and stranger incidents with regard to the setting of an incident and the gender of the target of anger expression. The typical (modal) incident involving a person known to a participant took place in a "private" setting such as someone's home. In contrast, most stranger incidents occurred in "public" settings such as a street, bar, or shopping mall. A further difference was in the gender of the person present in the situation who was the target of anger expression. When the angry person was known to the participant, the target of anger was likely to be someone of the other gender. Thus, in incidents involving a known male, the target of anger tended to be a female, whereas when incidents involved a known female, the target of anger tended to be a male. For stranger incidents, the target of anger was significantly more likely to be a male than a female. A further observation that fits with the gender-related findings described so far is the pattern that emerged with respect

to "missing" data in the present study. While all participants could recall an anger incident involving a male known to them and all but one could recall an incident involving a known female, five participants were unable to describe an anger incident involving a female stranger. At the same time, only one participant could not recall an incident involving a male stranger.

The pattern of findings with respect to the link between gender and anger expression suggests the following interpretation. Stereotypical beliefs associating anger with males may reflect a greater willingness by men than women to express anger in public settings. If men are less reluctant than women to express anger in public settings, other people (strangers) are more likely to witness this form of emotional expression by men. Furthermore, if the target of anger expression in a public setting is also more likely to be a male than a female, this may contribute to beliefs linking anger with males. Thus, people's greater exposure to anger expression by men in public settings may underlie the gender-typing of anger as a male emotion. One possibility that would follow from this interpretation is that measures of gender-emotion stereotypes may tap people's beliefs about anger expression by strangers.

Gender-related differences were not apparent in participants' accounts of anger incidents involving individuals known to them and such incidents were described as taking place primarily in private settings. If findings based on self-report and observation measures reflect expression of anger toward known persons primarily in private settings, then this may account for the absence of reported gender differences with such measures.

The present findings imply that one source of the contradictory findings with respect to the gender-anger link may lie in a failure to take into consideration the setting in which anger is

expressed. This possibility is also in keeping with the conclusion drawn by Ben-David (1993) on the basis of her review of findings on anger expressed as violent, aggressive behavior. According to Ben-David, gender-related differences in aggressive behavior are most pronounced in public settings. In a similar vein, White and Kowalski (1994) evaluated available evidence on gender and aggressive behavior and concluded that gender-related differences in aggressive behavior are relatively absent when the setting for such behavior is a private or domestic one.

An alternative explanation for the present findings is that the incidents described, particularly the gendered order in which incidents were recounted, could reflect the influence of shared beliefs about the gender-anger link on participants' recall of specific incidents. While the potential influence of such stereotypic beliefs cannot entirely be ruled out, the procedures employed for eliciting accounts of anger incidents were designed to minimize the salience of gender to participants. Nevertheless, given the tacit nature of such beliefs, their role as a possible contributory influence in shaping the results obtained cannot completely be precluded. At the same time, such implicit beliefs about the gender-anger link may serve as a background to all social interactions, regulating both expression of anger by males and females, as well as others' recall of anger incidents. Thus, shared beliefs about the gender-appropriateness of anger expression in different social contexts may regulate the behavior of males and females such that women are more likely than men to avoid expressing anger in public settings or to restrict this form of emotional expression to private, domestic settings.

The present findings with respect to gender and the setting of anger expression are also amenable to an interpretation in terms of Campbell's (1993) proposal that anger expression

serves differential purposes for women and men. According to Campbell, men may tend to use anger expression in service of instrumental goals, whereas anger expression by women more often may reflect relational goals. If the subtext of women's expression of anger is that of addressing relationship concerns, then this could explain the relative preponderance of anger incidents involving men in public settings when participants first recalled a stranger incident and also the low frequency of anger incidents in a public setting that involved women who were known to participants.

A further consideration in interpretation of the present findings is the nature of the sample. The anger incidents described by participants may have reflected the experiences and lifestyles typical of young, somewhat privileged, adults having a relatively homogeneous ethnic and cultural background (white students from a circumscribed geographic location). Further investigation would be necessary to determine whether the current pattern of findings would emerge within, or be generalizable to, a sample with differing social-cultural characteristics. In sum, while open to alternative interpretations, the present findings serve to underline the importance of considering social context or setting in understanding and explaining gender-related aspects of anger expression.

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Table I. Setting of Anger Incidents Involving Known Persons and Strangers

	SETTING			
TYPE OF INCIDENT	Private	Uncodeable	Workplace	Public
Known Person:				
Male	25	1	16	2
Female	25	6	5	7
Stranger:				
Male	1	7	34	1
Female	3	3	32	2

Note. The potential number of incidents in the known person and stranger categories, respectively, was 88; because of missing data, however, the actual number of known person incidents was 87 and the actual number of stranger incidents was 82. One participant could not recall an incident involving a known person who was female, resulting in 43 incidents for this category. Inability to recall an incident fitting the stranger category resulted in 43 incidents involving a male and 39 incidents involving a female.

Table II. Gender of Target of Anger for Known Person and Stranger Incidents

	ANGER INCIDENT			
	Known Person		Stranger	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
TARGET OF ANGER:				
Male	11	19	17	18
Female	17	7	7	3
More than one person	1	4	8	1
A child	2	0	2	9
Target not present	11	13	5	5
Uncodeable	2	0	4	3
Total	44	43	43	39

Note. Because of missing data, the total number of known person incidents was 87 and the total number of stranger incidents was 82. One participant could not recall an incident involving a known person who was female, resulting in 43 incidents for this category. Inability to recall an incident fitting the stranger category resulted in 43 incidents involving a male and 39 incidents involving a female.